Introduction

If the *Times Literary Supplement* were to ask its readers which works they considered to be supreme masterpieces of medieval literature, what would be the result? No doubt the *Chanson de Roland* would figure prominently, as would the Arthurian romances by Chrétien de Troyes. In all probability *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival* and Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan* would also be listed. In addition, Dutch readers of the *TLS* would be certain to make a case for *Van den vos Reynaerde* (literally: 'Of Reynaert the Fox'). This Middle Dutch beast epic is famous among specialists, but is hardly known outside the Netherlands and Belgium as a result of the language barrier.

The present edition of *Van den vos Reynaerde* with its translation into English on facing pages hopes to bridge the gap between this thirteenth-century text and non-Dutch readers. They are likely to find it as fresh and entertaining as it was when it was first written. It will enable them to get acquainted with, for example, the author's composition technique, his lively style, his preference for striking descriptive details, his wit and his deeply cynical outlook on life. Text and translation are accompanied by explanatory notes (to be found at the bottom of the page). A glossary, short introduction to Middle Dutch and suggestions for further reading conclude this volume. First, however, this introduction will discuss the literary tradition of the medieval beast epic and facts known about the author. It will also provide a brief summary and note major features of the tale, the implied audience and the transmission and reception of the work.

1 Literary tradition

Our knowledge of medieval beast literature in western Europe is almost entirely limited to those stories that were written down, initially in Latin, later also in the vernacular languages.[1] No doubt stories about animals will also have been passed down by word

1 For an introduction in English based on recent research into nine centuries of Reynaert literature, see Varty 2000; for an introduction in Dutch, see Janssens & Van Daele 2001.

of mouth, but very little is known about this oral tradition. This makes it difficult to determine the relationship between the oral transmission of tales and written, literary culture or the extent to which the two traditions are rooted in popular and (Latin) scholarly cultures. Vehement debates about the origins of the western European beast epic have been the result.

As early as the nineteenth century the so-called 'folklorists' looked for the answer in folk poetry about animals that either had not been preserved, or had not been recorded until a much later date. This type of poetry was initially regarded by Jacob Grimm as an animal saga, already known by the Germanic tribes, which had developed independently from the classical fables. Later, Leopold Sudre was an exponent of the idea that orally disseminated medieval folk tales featuring animals were based in part on classical fables and Latin monastic poetry. The 'Aesopists', on the other hand, detected the direct examples of the Latin and vernacular beast epics from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in these early medieval written animal stories.[2]

Lucien Foulet has shown convincingly that the authors of the earliest Old French Renart narratives did, in fact, frequently derive material directly from the *Ysengrimus*, a Middle Latin beast epic named after the wolf who, in confrontations with the cunning fox Reinardus, is continually worsted. The author of the *Ysengrimus*, too, creatively recycled a considerable amount of material from classical fables, so that the supposed dependence on folk tales is doubtful, to say the least.[3] Although the last word has not yet been said (or written) about the early history of the *Roman de Renart* and the *Ysengrimus*, these narratives are clearly essential to a proper understanding of the tradition of which *Van den vos Reynaerde* forms part. The author of this Middle Dutch beast epic, 'Willem', was familiar with at least part of the Old French corpus of texts and used it in the course of his composition. The Flemish poet was by no means exceptional in this. Nearly all medieval beast literature, both in Latin and in the vernacular, made creative use of existing texts.

The literary tradition to which *Van den vos Reynaerde* belongs, is ultimately, by way of various medieval stepping-stones, based on the Greek fable of the sick lion, ascribed to Aesop. It may well be that Willem did not know this fable in its original form. Nevertheless knowledge of this oldest of all sources is useful. As the paraphrase below shows, a number of motifs in *Van den vos Reynaerde* have a long and venerable ancestry:

> The lion had become old and lay sick in his den. All the animals visited their king, except the fox. Then the wolf took the opportunity to blacken the fox's reputation with the lion: the fox was said to despise the ruler of all animals

2 For the theories formulated by folklorists and Aesopists, see Grimm 1834; Sudre 1893; Foulet 1914.
3 For a discussion of the dependence of the *Ysengrimus* on classical fables, see Mann 1988.

> and had not come to see the king for that reason. At that moment the fox appeared; he had just managed to overhear to wolf's last words. The lion roared at him, but the fox asked for permission to say something in his defence and said: 'Which of all your visitors has done as much for you as I have? I traversed the whole world in search of a medicine for you – and now I have found it.' The lion commanded him to name the medicine at once. Then the fox said: 'You must flay a living wolf and wrap yourself in the skin while it is still warm.' And when the wolf lay there suffering, the fox laughed and said: 'Rulers should not be angered but be incited to good deeds.' The fable teaches that every sin brings its own punishment.[4]

This fable underwent a number of changes in the western European tradition. The most significant one is that King Lion's illness was gradually replaced by the proclamation of a court day as the reason for the animals to gather.[5] In the course of the Middle Ages this motif was developed in ever more voluminous writings. In the Middle Latin *Ysengrimus*, written just before 1150 in Ghent, the court day episode numbers some twelve hundred lines (book III), the Old French *Le Plaid* ('The Trial') has just under seventeen hundred, *Van den vos Reynaerde* has double that amount, and in *Reynaerts historie* ('The History of Reynaert'), the fifteenth-century Middle Dutch adaptation and continuation of *Van den vos Reynaerde*, this number is doubled again. From the *Ysengrimus* onwards the animals in the stories are not only the characteristic representatives of their kind, but also individuals. They are given fixed proper names: the wolf is called Ysengrimus, Ysengrin, Ysingrijn, the fox Reinardus, Renart, Reynaert. In addition situations and customs from the contemporary, real world are interpolated and sometimes satirized. It will not be accidental that the monk who wrote the Middle Latin *Ysengrimus* for a monastic audience, regularly presents the greedy wolf as an abbot and bishop. In *Le Plaid* and *Van den vos Reynaerde* the setting is that of a feudal, chivalric society: the wolf and the fox have become barons.

The title *Roman de Renart* refers to a complex of Old French stories called 'branches', rather than a single text. They have as their subject matter the conflicts between the fox Renart and his arch-enemy Ysengrin the wolf and the other animals in King Noble's realm. The oldest surviving story was probably written about 1175 by Pierre de Saint-Cloud (referred to as 'Perrot'; see p. 15) and relates the origin of the feud: the adultery between Renart and Ysengrin's wife Hersent, and later Renart's rape of Hersent,

4 The paraphrase of the fable of the sick lion is based on a German translation (Schnur 1985, p. 111) of the Greek text (Perry 1952, Aes. 258).

5 Changes in the fable of the sick lion in the western European tradition are discussed in Graf 1920, pp. 13-25; Bartelinck 1977; Goossens 1996b.

which led to legal proceedings at the court of King Noble.[6] This story must have been instantly successful, for between 1175 and 1180 six other narratives about Renart were written by different authors, up to 1205 there were another eleven, and even in the first half of the thirteenth century several more appeared. These Renart branches at first functioned independently (even though they responded to one another), but soon they were collected in compilations. Fourteen complete manuscript compilations are extant, as well as nineteen fragments and manuscripts containing one or more branches, dating mainly from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Research into the *Roman de Renart* was long aimed at reconstruction: of the sources, or of the original texts, and of the *Ur*-compilation on which the compilation codices are based.[7] In the past few decades more attention has been paid to the diversity of the literary and manuscript forms of the extant branches.[8]

Editions of the compilation manuscripts A, B and C are available.[9] The most usual numbering of the branches is the one adopted in the edition by Ernest Martin. It is based on the sequence of the stories as they appear in manuscript A rather than on the date of composition. *Le Plaid*, also known as *Le Jugement* ('The Judgement') is branch I here. In this verse narrative – a sequel to branch II-Va – the fox Renart faces criminal charges by Ysengrin and Chantecler and is summoned three times. Sentenced to be hanged, he begs for mercy; he promises to better his life and to undertake a journey to the Holy Land. Moved by pity King Noble relents. However, as soon as Renart has left the court as a pilgrim, he maltreats Coart the hare and mocks the king. All the courtiers pursue the fox, who manages to reach Maupertuis in the nick of time.

It is not surprising that, when writing *Van den vos Reynaerde*, it was this branch I that Willem took as an example. From a literary point of view *Le Plaid* is one of the most attractive stories of the *Roman de Renart*, and, probably for that reason, the one surviving in the largest number of manuscripts. The story was also rewritten repeatedly by Old French poets. In *Le duel judiciaire* (branch VI) the fox stands trial once again for his crimes. This time this results in a judicial duel with Ysengrin, which Renart loses. In *Renart médecin* (branch X) the fox is summoned by orders of the king, at first by the dog Roonel, later by Brichemer the stag, but in both cases the mission fails through

6 For an edition of the earliest branches (II-Va), see Lodge and Varty 2001.

7 For research into the *Roman de Renart*, see Jauss 1959 ; Flinn 1963; Bossuat 1967; De Combarieu & Subrenat 1987 (motif and character indices); Nieboer & Verhulsdonck 1988; Varty 1998 (bibliography).

8 For examples of the 'récriture' and 'mouvance' of *Renart*-branches, see Varty 1988-1991 and Scheidegger 1989.

9 For an edition of the *Roman de Renart* according to compilation manuscript A, see Martin 1882-1887; according to ms. B, see Roques 1948-1963; according to ms C, see Fukumoto, Harano & Suzuki 1983-1985. For translations based on the edition by Martin (ms. A): Jauss-Meyer 1965 (German); Dufournet & Méline 1985 (French); Owen 1994 (English). For French translations based on the Roques edition (ms. B), see Toesca 1979; Rey Flaud & Eskénazi 1982.

Renart's doing. Not until Renart hears that Noble has fallen ill does he travel to the king's court with Grinbert. There he poses as a doctor and of course knows exactly how the king can be cured: by making him sweat heavily in Ysengrin's skin. It is sometimes difficult to see whether the author has conceived of a new story or presents a new version of an existing story. In two *Roman de Renart* manuscripts (B and H) *Le Plaid* contains a passage of approximately a hundred and thirty lines in which Renart's conviction and reconciliation with the king has been completely rewritten. This version particularly distinguishes itself by the detailed account of the barons' consultation that precedes the death sentence and by the role played by Grinbert, here presented as his nephew's saviour.[10]

The Middle Dutch author sticks to the broad outlines of the plot of his original, but in the details he goes his own way entirely. This means that, when plots are compared, the suspense factor in these stories no longer lies in the question *if* the fox will manage to keep out of the clutches of the king and his courtiers, but rather *how* that is achieved. This applies to us, the modern readers, and must also have been true for Willem's audience, in so far as it was familiar with other animal stories (see pp. 31-33). In comparison with *Le Plaid* and the other branches set during a court day, *Van den vos Reynaerde* distinguishes itself in particular by the superior manner of the Flemish fox's escape from execution. In *Le Plaid* King Noble takes pity on the fox and pardons him, which may be generous, but is hardly convincing from a psychological point of view. In Willem's poem the fox plays on Nobel's greed by weaving a brilliant concoction of lies. He misleads the king with the story of his unhappy childhood and by casually mentioning a treasure and a conspiracy to kill King Nobel. Even Reynaert's own relatives are said to have been involved in that plot. Next he gives a detailed description of the place where the treasure is to be found, which is confirmed by Cuwaert the hare, capping the deception by the tale of his excommunication which will enable him to flee the court as a pilgrim. A mere promise of profit – and nothing more substantial – is sufficient ground for Nobel to be reconciled with Reynaert. The French king may have been sentimental, the Flemish king proves to be immoral. This is also the reason why the reputation of the court is tarnished far worse at the end of Willem's poem than it is in *Le Plaid*.

Willem may have known the *Ysengrimus*, which was probably written in Ghent in 1148-1149, in other words, in roughly the same location as where, a century later, *Van den vos Reynaerde* was composed.[11] In this cleverly compiled Latin poem of more than

10 For the rewritten passage in branch I in mss B and H, compare lines 1339-1478 in the Roques edition (1948-1963) to lines 1313-1418 in the edition by Martin 1882-1887.

11 For an edition of the *Ysengrimus* (Latin text and English translation and commentary), see Mann 1987. A verse translation in Dutch was published in Van Mierlo 1946; see also the more recent prose translation by Nieuwenhuis (1997).

6,500 lines, divided into seven books, the greedy wolf takes centre stage. The best supporting role for a male character is for the fox, his enemy and evil counsellor. Their confrontations are primarily verbal in character, with Reinardus' illusory reality dominating that of the wolf. As a result Ysengrimus allows himself to be manipulated and, back in the real world, is severely punished for his credulity. He is repeatedly seriously wounded, is flayed to cure the sick king and is eventually torn apart by a herd of wild pigs.[12]

The literary tradition of writings about animals comprises not only the narrative, fictional beast epic – including the fable[13] – but also scientific writings about animals. In both categories animals are described not for their own sake, but to transmit a deeper meaning. Whereas in the beast epic the animals are authorial creations, meant to provide a moralising representation of human life, animals in Latin bestiaries or 'books of beasts' are seen as natural phenomena, in accordance with the medieval view that the created, transitory world refers to God's real, eternal world.[14] The outer characteristics and behaviour of the animals is interpreted allegorically. In this way they provide medieval mankind with lessons about God and the devil, about heaven and hell, about virtue and sin. In works on natural history – as in *De naturis rerum* by Thomas of Cantimpré, translated and adapted by the thirteenth-century Flemish author Jacob van Maerlant in his *Der naturen bloeme* – there is more emphasis on zoological knowledge. Information of this kind was not usually, however, the result of personal observation, but was derived from such authorities as the philosopher Aristotle (384-322 BC), who in the Middle Ages was seen as the greatest scholar of all time, Pliny (23/24-79), the Roman military commander, procurator and writer, and the archbishop and encyclopedist Isidore of Seville (ca. 565-636).[15]

2 *The author*

In *Van den vos Reynaerde* we meet a self-confident poet. He uses the first line of the prologue to state his name, Willem, and the title of an earlier work, *Madocke*: he is *Willem die Madocke maecte* ('Willem who made *Madock*'). At the end of the poem he again incorporates his first name by means of an acrostic, using the first letter of each of the last nine lines: *BI WILLEME* (3461-69). The two references to his name will have served to recommend the work to his audience; however, for the modern reader

12 For a survey of the Latin beast epic in the Middle Ages, see Knapp 1979; Ziolkowski 1993.
13 For a discussion of Middle Dutch fables, see Wackers 1993; Schippers 1995; Schippers 1999.
14 For an English translation of a Latin bestiary, see White 1980.
15 Bestiaries and encyclopedias (among them Maerlant's *Der naturen bloeme*) are discussed in Wackers 1986, section 2.3; Bouwman 1993b; Wackers 2001; Wackers 2005.

they remain obscure. No poem called *Madocke* has come down to us and of the author we know nothing more than can be deduced from the text of *Van den vos Reynaerde* itself. For example, the poem's language shows that Willem came from East Flanders.[16] He must have been well-educated and widely read, was familiar with Old French beast narratives, which provided material and inspiration, and was well-informed about legal procedures. He may have been a monk with considerable experience in worldly affairs.[17]

A few lines down a second author is mentioned in the prologue: 'Arnout' (6). He is said to have failed to complete or write one or more stories about Reynaert. Initially critics assumed a joint authorship and Arnout was seen as the writer who had started *Van den vos Reynaerde* but had not been able to complete it. Willem was supposed to have rewritten the section composed by his predecessor (approximately up to the conviction) and to have completed it by adding the section on Reynaert's reconciliation, revenge and escape.[18] Later, however, a greater appreciation of the unity displayed by the composition of the poem led to the view, now generally held, that the poem was the work of a single author: Willem. The similar ways in which the Old French sources were used in the first and second sections of *Van den vos Reynaerde* would seem to confirm this opinion.[19]

This conclusion obviously requires a different explanation for the second name. Some scholars associate Arnout with the prologue of Willem's most important Old French source, *Le Plaid*, in which an anonymous author mentions a certain 'Perrot' who is supposed to have 'forgotten' to record the story of Reynaert's trial.[20] Others hold it to be an invented name, made up for the sake of creating ambiguity or as an oblique hint at the Middle Dutch, thirteenth-century Arthurian *Roman van Walewein*, as this romance was written by two authors (Penninc and Pieter Vostaert).[21] It has also been suggested that Arnout is the author of a Flemish translation of the Old French beast narrative to which *Le Plaid* is a sequel.[22]

Van den vos Reynaerde must have been written after the composition of *Le Plaid*, for which, as we saw earlier, a date of composition is assumed of 1179, and before 1279, the

16 For a discussion of the author's East Flemish origin on the basis of linguistic forms, see Muller 1917, chapter III; Gysseling 1966/67.

17 Various historical persons have been suggested. Van Daele 2005 pleaded the case of the Cistercian lay brother Willem van Boudelo (died July 1261). However, conclusive evidence is lacking.

18 For arguments in favour of joint authorship, see Muller 1944, pp. 14-24.

19 For arguments in favour of single authorship, see Van Mierlo 1942; Arendt 1965. On implications of the adaptation technique for the question of authorship, see Bouwman 1991, pp. 418-420.

20 On Arnout as an Old French author (Perrot), see Van Mierlo 1942; Arendt 1965, pp. 3-6; Bouwman 1991, pp. 45-47.

21 For arguments that Arnout is an invented name, cf. Hellinga 1957, pp. 18-20 and Lulofs 1983, p. 200.

22 For Arnout as the Flemish translator of 'branch II-Va', see Delbouille 1929, pp. 46-47.

last year in which *Reynardus vulpes*, the Latin translation of *Van den vos Reynaerde*, can have been written (see p. 36). There have been several attempts at narrowing down this broad estimate with its margin of one hundred years by reading the poem to a greater or lesser degree as a *roman à clef*. Maurits Gysseling discerned allusions to historical events from the last years of the reign of Philip of Alsace, Count of Flanders (1168-1191), on the basis of which he dates the work before 1191. Leopold Peeters, on the other hand, wanted to assign a date of around 1260, as several passages were considered by him to refer to the struggle between two noble dynasties, the Dampierre and the Avesnes families, about the succession in Flanders and Hainault.[23]

A certain consensus has formed around the latter date, although on different grounds. It appears that Willem made use of an Old French compilation, the original version of which is dated after 1205. Aspects of his versification technique have also led to a date of around or just after the middle of the thirteenth century.[24] In addition there are several Middle Dutch works that allude to *Van den vos Reynaerde*. Jacob van Maerlant, for example, announces in his *Rijmbijbel* (completed in 1271) in connection with the truth value of his poem: *dit nes niet madox droem / noch reinard noch arturs boerden* ('this is not Madoc's dream, nor a wild story about Reinard or Artur'), perhaps referring to the story about Madoc mentioned in the first line of *Van den vos Reynaerde*. Here, Maerlant shows his contempt for the fictitious lies in *Van den vos Reynaerde* and other stories, which would seem to have been written reasonably recently.[25]

Positioning Willem in East Flanders does not automatically provide us with a clue as to the region where the poem originated. As is evident from the oeuvre of the Flemish author Maerlant, whose works were commissioned by patrons in the county of Holland, the author of *Van den vos Reynaerde* might have written for people in a region other than East Flanders. However, the Flemish origin of the work is confirmed by the author's use of place-names, such as 'Abstale' (802), 'Belsele' (2097), 'Elmare' (373 ff.), 'Hijfte' (2262-63), 'Hulsterloe' (2575 ff.), 'Kriekepit' (2578 ff.), 'Leye' (2640) and 'Waes' (2257). These toponyms from the Ghent area indicate that the work's primary audience must have been familiar with the geography of East Flanders (see also p. 28 and the Index of proper names).[26]

23 See for the early date Gysseling 1975; for the date around 1260, see Peeters 1973/74.

24 For a date in the third quarter of the thirteenth century, see Bouwman 1991, pp. 418-420 (on the basis of the Old French compilation); Van den Berg 1983, p. 224 (versification); Janssens 1991, pp. 174-175 (allusions; collected in Van Oostrom 1983).

25 Maerlant's *Rijmbijbel* (Gysseling 1983) , lines 34.813-14.

26 On toponyms, see Teirlinck 1910-1912; Van Daele 1994.

3 The text

3.1 The Prologue

In his prologue (1-40) Willem addresses 'peasants and fools' (13), urging them with considerable force to leave his text alone, as they will not understand it anyway (11-24). A few lines further down the poet makes clear that his work is intended for those who know how to appreciate it (34, 39): *Ic wille dat dieghene horen [...] Diet verstaen met goeden sinne* ('I wish it to be heard by those ... who will understand it properly'). But how is Willem's poem to be understood? [27]

A similar authorial attitude is found in *Esopet*. In the prologue to this late thirteenth or early fourteenth-century Middle Dutch collection of fables the author also discusses the way in which the work should be understood. The anonymous *Esopet* poet points out to his audience that, although his fables may not be a direct representation of the real world, they none the less contain truth:

> Ic sal u hier exemple maken
> Van beesten recht of si spraken.
> Maer merket ende hoert
> Meer die redene dan die woert.
> Ontdoet elc wort, ghi vinter in
> Redene ende goeden sin.[28]
>
> (I shall provide an example for you here of animals, as if they could speak.
> But mark and listen to the meaning rather than the words. Unlock each word,
> you'll find in it reason and a good meaning.)

Whereas in the fables, a fictional tale of limited size is closely connected with an explicitly formulated moral, the story in a full-blown beast epic such as *Van den vos Reynaerde* rises to a higher plane, while the moral meaning remains implicit. And yet Willem's desire that the audience may *verstaen met goede sinne* this new work of his is not far removed from the advice that they should discover the *goeden sin* in *Esopet*, or rather, it is its result. The readers and listeners of *Van den vos Reynaerde*, too, should first see through the 'lies' of the tale (that animals can speak and behave like human beings) before finding the deeper meaning of that story.[29]

27 For a study of prologues in Middle Dutch texts, see Sonnemans 1995.
28 *Esopet*; Stuiveling 1965, lines 17-22.
29 See for a discussion of the truth value and meaning of beast narratives, Wackers 1986, pp. 12-38.

3.2 *The plot*

Court day – At Whitsun King Nobel holds court. The lion sends for his subjects and everyone appears, with the exception of the fox Reynaert. Ysingrijn the wolf, the dog Cortoys and Pancer the beaver charge the absent baron before the king with rape, theft and physical abuse respectively. Reynaert's case is taken up by his nephew, Grimbeert the badger. The latter's eloquent defence is interrupted by the arrival of the cock Cantecleer, followed by a bier. Cantecleer accuses the fox of the multiple murders of his children; the dead body on the bier – it is his daughter Coppe – is the latest proof of Reynaert's crimes. The king decides, in particular on the grounds of this last complaint, to summon the fox. (41-496)

First summons – Bruun the bear departs as the king's messenger to Manpertuus, the fox's fortress, but fails in his task. Blinded by the desire for honey that Reynaert has promised him, he gets stuck in a half-split oak in the yard of the villager Lamfroyt. Before managing to escape, he is severely maltreated by the quickly assembled villagers. Badly injured and with nothing to show for his pains, he returns to the king's court. (497-1042)

Second summons – The king's next messenger, Tybeert the cat, is hardly more successful. Eager to have mice for his dinner, Tybeert allows himself to be led by Reynaert to a priest's barn. There he walks into a snare that had been prepared for the fox. The cat's loud cries wake the priest and his family, who give him a severe beating. He barely manages to extricate himself and flee. Blind in one eye he arrives at court. (1043-1358)

Third summons – After the second failed summons, King Nobel sends Grimbeert as his messenger. The badger persuades the accused to accompany him to the court. On the way there the fox confesses his sins to his nephew, as a result of which countless crimes come to light. He especially dwells extensively and full of malicious delight on his bad behaviour towards Ysingrijn. He recounts how the wolf, as a result of the fox's actions, got stuck in a priest's barn and later fell off a beam in the roof of a house and on each occasion was badly beaten. It is clear that Reynaert's contrition is not sincere, for when they pass the garden of a convent, the fox tries to grab a cockerel. His confessor indignantly calls him to order. (1359-1752)

Conviction and reconciliation – At court, Reynaert is tried and sentenced to death. Before being led to the gallows, the fox asks permission to make a public confession. Initially he describes how he came to live a life of sin. However, in a subtle way he works round to an (invented) story about a treasure and a conspiracy on the king's life. The wolf, bear and cat, as well as Grimbeert and Reynaert's own father are said to have made every effort to dethrone Nobel and to put Bruun on the throne. The conspiracy was foiled only because Reynaert managed to steal his father's treasure, which would have financed the rising. There is no one present at court to contradict this tale: Ysingrijn, Bruun and Ty-

beert are erecting the gallows somewhere else, Grimbeert has in the meantime left the court together with Reynaert's relatives, and Reynaert Sr is said to have died. In fear of his life, but especially eager to get his hands on the treasure, King Nobel believes Reynaert's words. In addition, the queen points out that Reynaert is accusing his own relatives. His story must, therefore, be true. The king promises to pardon Reynaert in exchange for the treasure. The fox describes the place where he has buried it: near the spring Kriekeputte, not far from Hulsterloe. Nobel is not entirely happy about it all, and asks the fox to come with him to dig up the treasure. Knowing that there is no such thing, Reynaert thinks up a new lie. He declares that three years earlier he was excommunicated by the pope and that it is now high time for him to travel to Rome to have the ban lifted. From there he will journey on to the Holy Land. In the course of the official reconciliation with Reynaert the king refrains from mentioning the treasure and the excommunication to his subjects, merely stating that the fox is about to go on a pilgrimage. (1753-2795)

Revenge and flight – On their return from the field where they have erected the gallows, the bear and the wolf are imprisoned. The fox has a scrip – a special bag for pilgrims – cut from the skin on Bruun's back. Ysingrijn and his wife suffer in a similar way when they are made to provide shoes made of wolf's skin for the fox's journey. In this way Reynaert revenges himself on his opponents. King Nobel orders Belin the ram, his court chaplain, to hand over the pilgrim's attributes to Reynaert during a church ceremony. Before leaving with all the accoutrements needed by a pilgrim, the fox persuades Belin and Cuwaert the hare to accompany him a little way on his pilgrimage. As soon as he arrives at his home Manpertuus, he kills Cuwaert and sends Belin, who was waiting outside, back to the court with a letter in Reynaert's bag. He advises the ram to say that he, Belin, is the author of the letter. This is what Belin does. However, when the letter proves to be nothing but Cuwaert's bloody head, Belin has unwittingly made himself responsible for the murder of the hare. Reynaert's deception is unmistakable. Nobel, humiliated, utters a terrible roar. His position has become precarious, for by his own fault he has become embroiled with his two mightiest barons. The leopard Fyrapeel manages to reconcile the king with Bruun and Ysingrijn: the bear and the wolf are allowed, in exchange for their loyalty, to pursue and kill all members and descendants of Belin's and Reynaert's families till the end of time. Peace appears to have been restored. (2796-3469)

3.3 Words and deeds

The action in *Van den vos Reynaerde* consists mainly of conflict situations in which characters are pitted against one another. The conflicts are caused by Reynaert. In his encounters with Cuwaert, with Canticleer and his children, with Ysingrijn in the priest's barn and on the roof beam of a house, with Cuwaert and Belin at Manpertuus,

he is always the aggressor. In the confrontation with Bruun and Tybeert as the king's messengers as well as with King Nobel himself, he responds to the court community that wishes to make him toe the line. Each time the fox manages to exploit the weaknesses of his opponents and to turn the situation to his own advantage by tricking them in an ingenious way.

The tricks follow more or less the same pattern. Reynaert greets his opponent with a great deal of flattery. In passing he mentions something that arouses a strong desire: honey, mice, a treasure, being literate. The opponent gets excited and flatters the fox, even promising him something in return for the coveted object or skill. Having made the deal, Reynaert leads his future victim to the trap. The opponent enters the trap, spurred on by Reynaert, with the result that he is humiliated and maltreated. Reynaert's confrontations with the representatives of the court community in particular run along the lines of this pattern, albeit that in the final, ultimate confrontation a number of motifs return at an abstract level: the king is led only in his mind's eye to the wilderness of Kriekeputte, where the so-called treasure is said to have been buried. He also suffers only symbolically from the usual taunts and maltreatment. Nevertheless the 'letter' that Reynaert gives Belin the ram for King Nobel, and the latter's desperate roar when he sees through Reynaert's deception and faces his own disgrace, leave little to the imagination.[30]

The author succeeds in varying the presentation of the tricks in a subtle way. At the beginning of the poem it is a character, Canticleer, who describes the way in which Reynaert misled him and killed and devoured the larger part of his feathered offspring. The people listening to *Van den vos Reynaerde* are as much part of the audience as the assembled animals at the king's court. Next the audience is informed at considerable length by the narrator about the two tricks that the fox plays on his victims Bruun and Tybeert, the king's messengers. In his confession Reynaert adopts the role of narrator and tells Grimbeert – and by implication the poem's readers or listeners – in great detail of two tricks played on Ysingrijn.

When, after his conviction, the fox addresses the court, the information known by the audience of *Van den vos Reynaerde* no longer corresponds to what Reynaert's animal audience knows: the former now see through the fox much more clearly than the latter group does. Now *two* tricks are revealed simultaneously – although at different levels. Reynaert tells the animals at the king's court of the trick by which he managed to end the conspiracy: the theft of the treasure. However, in the meantime the readers or listeners of *Van den vos Reynaerde* realize, as a result of the narrator's intervention,

30 The tricks used by the fox to manipulate appearance and reality during a confrontation with the opponent in the *Roman de Renart* have been discussed by Jauss 1959, p. 212. This idea was applied to *Van den vos Reynaerde* by Arendt who analyses the structure and action of the tricks (Arendt 1965, pp. 149-207). For some modification of Arendt's analysis, see Bouwman 1991, pp. 402-405.

that in fact a very different trick is in the process of being developed here, one which will enable Reynaert to mislead the king and save his own skin. That trick, too, is centred on the treasure.[31]

A characteristic aspect of the tricks in *Van den vos Reynaerde* is their extremely verbal nature. The fox paints with pretty words (*scone tale*, according to the narrator in line 1075) a picture of a world as his opponents would have it, but which deviates drastically from the events that are about to take place. Even when Reynaert mocks his victims, he exploits the gap between rhetoric and reality.[32] We see this for example in the following cases. Bruun has managed to pull himself free of the half-split oak and has escaped the villagers by jumping into the river. A fair way downstream he drifts to the river bank, where Reynaert sees him lying on the sand, badly hurt. The fox mocks Bruun by pretending that he does not recognize him and mistakes him for a priest, cynically taking the bear's bloody head and paws for the skull cap and gloves of an abbot or prior (941-51). Also, when Tybeert is caught by the throat in the snare, which is threatening to throttle him, he screams loudly. On that occasion Reynaert compliments the cat on the melodious way he is 'singing at the dinner table' (1218-19).

This process of renewed interpretation and narration is central to the structure of *Van den vos Reynaerde* (see p. 22-23). Earlier events in the story are described again by a particular character, most often by the fox, but also by other animals. Its function is always the same: the character in question presents a biased version of events that have been related earlier, as it were rewrites history along the lines of his own desires and interests, and thus characterizes himself. We see this, for example, when Reynaert chases a cockerel near a convent, but is stopped by Grimbeert. The narrator next tells us that the fox, continuing on his way, keeps looking back, licking his chops. This sinful action, about which he is quite rightly rebuked by Grimbeert, is turned by Reynaert into a pious action: he reproaches his confessor for disturbing his prayers for the salvation of the souls of all his feathered victims from the nunnery's garden (1726-44).

After Reynaert has left Nobel's court as a pilgrim, he takes Cuwaert and Belin along to Manpertuus. While the ram waits outside, the fox takes Cuwaert into his den. Once there he grabs the hare by the throat – who in mortal fear calls for Belin – and kills him. When Belin, full of suspicion, asks Reynaert why Cuwaert called out to him, the fox reinterprets the actual events here, too (3222-47). The audience, aware of what really happened, sees through the deception in these words. Similarly, from the very beginning Grimbeert presents Reynaert's theft of a sausage and his (first) attempt on Cuwaert's life as the confiscation of stolen goods and the chastisement of a stupid pupil by his

31 For a discussion of the different forms in which the tricks are presented, see Bouwman 1993a, p. 38.
32 According to Mann 1987, pp. 58-77 speculating on the discrepancy between words and deeds is already a prominent theme in *Ysengrimus*. Cf. also Wackers 1994.

master (99-169, 247-62). Grimbeert's evocation of the fox as a pious hermit who is doing penance for his sins is unmasked as a lie in retrospect when Canticleer's story shows that Reynaert, disguised as a hermit, has misled the cock and in this way has succeeded in devouring many of his children (263-81, 315-420). The characters thus try to manipulate the fictional reality of the poem by means of their verbal skills.[33]

The poem's audience is given the opportunity to gauge the gap between appearance and reality. It is regularly given more information than the characters receive by means of the narrator's commentary on events in the story and the fox's 'asides'. This enables them to see Reynaert's words in perspective. The procedure is presented emphatically in the episode of the First Summons, where readers and listeners are confronted for the first time with one of the fox's tricks, and for that reason are not yet used to Reynaert's intentions and way with words (542-46, 623-26, 634-43, 903-8). It also happens in other episodes, for example when Reynaert has been convicted and resorts to a complex trick (2034-49, 2164-78, 2227-38).

In other words, the author plays a sophisticated game with his audience. Sometimes he involves them in the story, at other times he sets them thinking about what has happened. In this way he alternately creates involvement and distance. On the one hand Reynaert impresses not only King Nobel's court, but also the readers or listeners of the beast epic with his ingenious fabrications; on the other hand the narrator encourages the audience by means of his asides to see through the 'lies' of the story, so that they 'will understand it properly' (*verstaen met goeden sinne*; 39).[34]

Willem's poem does not contain any reports of historical events; there is only the made-up story. The audience knows from the outset that the happenings in this beast epic have never taken place, indeed, that they never could take place (as is the case, of course, in many fictional accounts). That is why every 'attempt' by the narrator to forge a link with (historical) reality has an ironic effect (see, for example, 293-301, 3016-21). This also happens when the animals in direct speech set the scene for their fictional actions in contemporary Flanders. For example, when a cock claims to have been shown a pilgrim's scrip and mantle by Reynaert that have come from the priory at Elmare (367-374), the tale's implied audience from East Flanders will think of the nearby priory of that name, but it will also realize that no pilgrim's attributes are handed over to foxes there.

Perhaps the anthropomorphism in *Van den vos Reynaerde*, i.e. making animals act and speak like human beings and using objects intended for use by humans, should be explained in a similar way. The clash of animal and human components is likely to elicit at least a smile – about a fox wearing four(!) shoes, for example (2852-2934) – but with

33 On the subject of new interpretations and newly recounted events by the story's characters, see Bouwman 1998.

34 For further examples and the narrator's ironic comments on Reynaert's feigned distress, see 2897-98 and 2990-94.

the laugh comes the realization of the impossibility of the representation. This realization may even be a condition for the comic effect.

At moments of verbal high tension the author and his Reynaert character seem to coincide in their roles of 'narrator/tempter'. Both create a contrast between reality and appearance, create 'fiction', both 'lie' in their attempts to convince their audiences. Willem is certainly not unsympathetic in his description of Reynaert's tricks. Nevertheless an appreciation of the esthetic perfection of Reynaert's verbal skills does not necessarily imply a positive evaluation of his actions. This is evident from the negative epithet *fel* (wicked, vicious) that is frequently used by both the narrator and other characters when referring to the fox: *Reynaert, den fellen* (60), *dat felle dier* (88), *die felle ghebuere* (344), *die felle* (614) etc. Moreover, the author seems to be just as critical of the fox's behaviour as he is of that of the fox's opponents (see p. 24-27).

3.4 *Literary space*

Willem regularly makes his characters, and Reynaert in particular, refer to real places. Thus the narrative space in his poem acquires a sense of actuality for his audience, while at the same time the author creates an ironic effect, as was suggested earlier. In his fabrications, the fox uses a multitude of well-known place names to enhance the truth of his tale.[35] The Flemish names evoke a sense of proximity, whereas place-names like Aachen and Paris (2630-31) broaden the perspective to 'far away'. This is not to say, however, that the story is set in a realistic, historic landscape. It is a tell-tale sign that the narrator himself refrains from any kind of realistic topography. He never, or almost never, provides exact locations for the places that are really important – particularly King Nobel's court and Manpertuus, Reynaert's den (a literary place-name!). There is little point, therefore, in tracing Bruun's journey on a map of thirteenth-century Flanders, for example, as has at times been tried in traditional place-name research (which considered the stream that Bruun jumps into in order to escape from the villagers to be the river Scheldt). Rather than real geography, we are dealing in *Van den vos Reynaerde* with a literary space.[36]

The author consistently situates the conflicts between the court animals and Reynaert in two distinctive landscapes: the well-ordered world of the court as opposed to the trackless wilderness. Nobel's landscape is a protected area, a fenced-in park filled with the softness of spring and a blissful peace (41-43, 322-39), a space characterised by straight roads (1314-17, 1702-3, 1747-50). The landscape in which Reynaert lives

35 For a survey of the traditional research into the place-names, see Teirlinck 1910-1912; Van Daele 1994, pp. 7-175.

36 For literary approaches to the question of space, see Arendt 1965, pp. 73-148; Van Daele 1994, pp. 217-542; for modifications, see Bouwman 1991, pp. 392-396; Bouwman 1996.

is complex and threatening for the court animals: mountainous, with dark woods and desolate, wild regions; there are no paved roads, at best crooked paths (502-12, 632-33, 881-87, 891). In a number of respects the moral lapses of the court animals in their conflict with the fox are represented spatially, as crossing the line from the well-organised world of the court and/or entering the wilderness. To mention a few examples: Canticleer ventures with his children *bueten mure*, outside the walls (393), Bruun reaches the half-split oak with honey along a crooked path (632-33), Tybeert only regains the *rechte strate*, the straight road leading back to the court, after his beating at the village priest's house (1314-17), King Nobel is sent by the fox to the terrifying Kriekeputte wilderness to get hold of the treasure (2572-2697). When Reynaert plans to pounce on one of the convent's cocks, he is also said to be *buter rechter vaert*, 'beside the straight road' (1694) – only a short time after he had promised his confessor Grimbeert to better his life 'and to point the right way / to all those he would see stray' (1682-83).

The conclusion of the confrontations often takes place in an in-between area where human beings live: the village (and, to a lesser degree, the convent). The inhabitants of the village are presented as rough, coarse and ugly, and as a group behave with hostility towards the court animals. It is to this uncourtly place that Reynaert leads his victims, where they are beaten up and reduced to whining animals, stripped of all courtly ideals and without the power of speech (644-849, 1163-1317, 1508-1604, 1610-45). For Reynaert the village is part of his hunting ground; for the court animals it belongs to the wilderness.

The 'park and wilderness' landscape described in *Van den vos Reynaerde* is, therefore, to a certain extent a psychological landscape. The appreciation of the scenery is determined from a court perspective: the parks have a positive meaning, the wildernesses a negative one. However, for Reynaert it is exactly the other way round: when, at the end of the story, he departs for good with his family, he extols the virtues of a new wilderness where they will be able to hunt to their heart's content (3153-65, 3317-29).

3.5 *Justice and its perversion*

The action in *Van den vos Reynaerde* develops within a legal framework: against the fox, continuously in conflict with the other animals, criminal proceedings are initiated at the court of King Nobel.[37] The story begins with the assembly of the court at Whitsun, presided over by the king. The fox's victims or – in the case of Cuwaert and Coppe

37 The legal aspects of *Van den vos Reynaerde* have been compared to real legal practice in the thirteenth century, partly on the basis of Van Caenegem 1954 and 1956, by legal historians. See Hermesdorf 1955; Jacoby 1970; Van Dievoet 1975; Van den Brink & Van Herwaarden 1977.

– their relatives bring charges against the fox. The accused is not present and is defended by a relative, but to no avail. Reynaert is summoned. Not until after the third summons does the fox appear at court. He is tried and sentenced to death by the barons. However, he manages to persuade the king to pardon him and thus escapes execution. Even so, he is incorrigible and revenges himself on his enemies. One might expect that in a plot of this kind the trial would be central. Nothing could be further from the truth, however: the whole trial is described, one might even say dismissed, in less than twenty lines (1868-84). The story is only half-way through when the legal proceedings against the fox are concluded! We can hardly, therefore, consider the extensive fabricated story spun by Reynaert at the king's court as an *oratio judicialis*, a legal speech in the strict sense of the word.[38] After all, Reynaert's speech does not start until after the verdict has been read and the executioners are on their way to prepare the gallows. It may be concluded that, despite the legal narrative framework, the poet of *Van den vos Reynaerde* finds other aspects of his text more important.[39]

Of greater significance than Reynaert's legal trial is the moral 'trial' with which Willem presents his audience. In that trial it is not just Reynaert who is indicted, but also, or rather in particular, his opponents. In much the same way as the king urged his barons to judge Reynaert (1879-84), the poet wishes to induce the audience to judge his characters, placed as they are on opposite sides of a conflict. The weightiest conflict in *Van den vos Reynaerde*, between the fox and the king, causes new, feudal conflicts. They undermine the relationship between Nobel and his vassals, and thus the court community itself.

It is striking in this context that initially the king asks his barons' advice before taking any legal step and also acts upon their counsel (466-81, 1000-16, 1328-31). Even when Reynaert appears at court, feudal harmony still reigns there. After a proper trial the fox is sentenced to death by the highest barons, who have been urged to do so by the king (1868-84). However, when the fox appears to be the owner of a huge treasure, Nobel's interests no longer coincide with those of his barons. That at once marks the end of any proper legal procedures. The king leads Reynaert out of the circle of courtiers for private discussion (2491-95). He is reconciled with Reynaert without asking his barons' advice and without telling them that he stands to gain a treasure. For the first time in the story the court has become internally divided in a conflict with the fox. Fissures appear in the fabric of the feudal order.

When Reynaert appears at court, he presents himself as the king's loyal servant and – without mentioning any names – accuses a number of courtiers of being false (1786-

38 On the notion that Reynaert's pack of lies is not an *oratio judicialis*, see Bouwman 1991, pp. 278-281.
39 The point of view that the legal aspects have a literary as well as a historical context was suggested by Heeroma 1971 and Bouwman 1991, pp. 360-367 and 397-402. This section is based on that discussion.

92). At first the fox's accusations seem little more than empty slander and are dismissed resolutely by Nobel as such (1796-1801). However, the invented conflict between the king and his barons becomes reality when, eager to believe the existence of a treasure and a conspiracy, the king withdraws his protection from the alleged conspirators Bruun and Ysingrijn and, without a trial, has them taken prisoner and maltreated. This is a felony and a very serious breach of the king's obligations as liege lord. The king now enters into a feud with his most important vassals. In the end Nobel manages to resolve this internal conflict only by committing more injustices.

As part of the reconciliation it is determined that Bruun and Ysingrijn and their relatives will be allowed to hunt and kill Belin, Reynaert and the clans to which they belong for all eternity. In issuing this decree the king once again – and this time irrevocably – breaks his obligations towards his vassals. Nobel now keeps the peace by *excluding* Belin and Reynaert and their relations from the peace; he denies these vassals their right to protection and delivers them to the mercies of wolves and bears, 'from now until Doomsday' (3443). The feudal order, for the safeguarding of which Reynaert was tried and convicted, has now been suspended. In actual fact the court ceases to exist as an orderly society, a community where predator and prey might live together in peace.

It is no accident that an eschatological dimension opens up here. In the encounter with Reynaert, the satanic tempter, each opponent separately falls from grace and eventually the court community as a whole is degraded from paradise to wilderness. Reynaert has experienced that process too, or so he says, after his conviction in a public confession (2070-78). The fox describes his mild behaviour towards the lambs as the blissful state of paradise, and his killing of a lamb as the beginning of his 'fall'. Willem alludes here to the well-known verses in the Bible where the prophet Isaiah describes the future messianic peace (in fact in terms of the lost paradise from *Genesis*):

> Habitat lupus cum agno et pardus cum hedo accubabit vitulus et leo et ovis simul morabuntur et puer parvulus minabit eos; vitulus et ursus pascentur simul requiescent catuli eorum et leo quasi bos comedet paleas.[40]
>
> The wolf shall dwell with the lamb: and the leopard shall lie down with the kid: the calf and the lion, and the sheep shall abide together, and a little child shall lead them. The calf and the bear shall feed: their young ones shall rest together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

The final passage of *Van den vos Reynaerde* – where the *leopard* tries to reconcile the *lion* with the *wolf* and the *bear* by delivering to them the *ram* and his descendants – is, in this

40 Is.II, 6-7 in the Douai-Rheims translation of the Vulgate (1581).

view, a cynical reversal of the biblical vision of peace. By doubling the 'paradise lost' motif, the author indicates that the court community now follows in Reynaert's footsteps. This insight is confirmed in yet other ways.

Fyrapeel explains to the king why Belin the ram has forfeited his life: 'he has admitted himself that he betrayed Cuwaert' (3418-19). These words cannot but remind one of Reynaert's words to Hermeline: 'The king acknowledged that Cuwaert was the first to accuse us falsely before him' (3108-10). Belin, like Cuwaert, is made a peace offering, a means of compensation in a reconcilation between third parties. Here, as was the case when Reynaert reported the king's decision to Hermeline, the audience may distinguish truth and untruth in what Fyrapeel says. It knows that Cuwaert did not treat Reynaert treacherously; it also knows that Belin was not the cause of Cuwaert's demise. But in the same way that Reynaert puts a very wide interpretation on the king's command to honour him (2780-83), the leopard understands Belin's confession that he has written the letter in a purely metaphorical way. This cross-current strengthens the audience's realization that in the end the actions of the court community are not hugely different from Reynaert's actions.

The wilderness encroaches on the court where predator and prey used to live harmoniously. Looking back from the end of *Van den vos Reynaerde*, we see that the theme of the lost paradise is also mirrored in the fable of which Reynaert reminds his listeners to illustrate how undesirable the usurpation of Nobel's throne by Bruun would have been (2299-2325). In this fable the frogs exchange their freedom entirely through their own fault for the tyranny of King Stork, 'who killed and devoured them wherever he found them, both in the water and in the field' (2311-13). In Reynaert's view, Bruun is like this devouring stork. Willem's audience knows that Reynaert is lying about the bear's role. But that same audience also knows after the bitter *denouement* of the story that Nobel, Bruun and Ysingrijn themselves are applicants for the role of King Stork when the sovereign has granted the wolf and the bear the right to persecute some of his subjects: 'In the field or in the woods, they will all be at your disposal and you may kill them as much as you like' (3444-46).

Van den vos Reynaerde is a story of animals that are wicked and stupid, and of one animal that is wicked and devious. Its readers and listeners must surely have admired the ingenuity of Reynaert's tricks. However, it is unlikely that their admiration prevented them from arriving at a moral judgement of the fox's behaviour. After all, the story is about animals and it is always someone else who is deceived. The story contains no character with whom the audience can effortlessly identify. In this respect *Van den vos Reynaerde* resembles the fable to which it indirectly owes its existence: its audience and readers are made to see in a mirror how to avoid 'beastly' behaviour themselves.

4. *The audience*

Earlier we saw that *Van den vos Reynaerde* was probably written in the third quarter of the thirteenth century, for an audience and/or readership likely to have enjoyed the fact that the action is situated by the characters themselves in the Flemish landscape. For example, the convent where Reynaert is said to have acquired his pilgrim's attributes and where Ysingrijn is said to have rung the bells is called Elmare (373, 1483, 1493), which was the name of a priory of Saint Peter's Abbey near Ghent. Also, the wolf and the fox are said to have sworn an oath of allegiance under a tree near Belsele (2097), and Reynaert claims that the conspirators gathered between Hijfte and Ghent (2263). There can be no doubt, therefore, that the implied audience of *Van den vos Reynaerde* is East Flemish. However, the poem contains no information – not even in the prologue – that allows a more precise identification of the person(s) for whom it was intended. Scholars of necessity have to make the best of indirect and often ambiguous data.

According to an old hypothesis *Van den vos Reynaerde* was written for a bourgeois audience. Its didactic tenor was thought to suit the mentality and cultural emancipation of the patricians in Flemish towns like Ghent and Bruges, which had enjoyed a marked economic boom in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and had also gained in political influence. In addition, it has been observed that this urban elite seems to be the only social group that is not satirized in Willem's poem, whereas the aristocracy, clergy and country people are severely criticized and mocked. From this point of view Reynaert can be seen as a freedom-loving individualist whose quick-wittedness brings about the fall of the antiquated feudal system. King Nobel is considered as more or less mirroring the count of Flanders.[41]

However, other critics have argued that within the narrative reality of the text Reynaert should be regarded as belonging to the high aristocracy (like Bruun and Ysingrijn, for example) and is a criminal rather than a trickster by medieval standards. In their view *Van den vos Reynaerde* was written for a court audience, as has also been argued for the Old French *Roman de Renart*. In that case the story was not inspired by bourgeois resentment, but either by aristocratic self-mockery, or by a real concern for the decline of feudal society. The conflict of King Nobel with his vassal Reynaert might then mirror the tensions present among the Flemish aristocracy in the thirteenth century. The lower aristocracy had lost a sizeable part of its freedom and power in its dealings with the count. The count, moreover, was not only liege lord, he was also a vassal of the king of France. The two Flemish countesses, Johanna and her sister Margareta had to deal with liege lords (Philip Augustus, Louis VIII and IX) who aimed to limit the independence

41 For arguments in favour of a bourgeois interest in Middle Dutch literature, see Jonckbloet 1852, pp. 122-123.

of their mighty vassal as much as lay within their power, making clever use of the conflicts between the count and the aristocracy and the urban patricians. There is some evidence that the aristocratic Dampierre family was familiar with *Van den vos Reynaerde*.[42]

Various compromises have been proposed. It is not impossible, for example, that, as is suggested in lines 26-31 of the prologue, *Van den vos Reynaerde* had an aristocratic patron, but was listened to by a bourgeois audience. It should also be taken into account that the urban elite of the thirteenth century consisted of several layers, as the aristocracy by birth had mixed to a considerable degree with the more socially successful members of the bourgeoisie. The possibility that vernacular literature was aimed at different social communities as its intended audience has also been suggested. In that case the text will have appealed to both the bourgeois elite in the towns and the court aristocracy.[43]

It is tempting to scan the text for details which might be made to fit the reality of the time and in particular the political situation in Flanders. In an extreme form we see this in attempts to read *Van den vos Reynaerde* as a *roman à clef* (see p. 16). Another approach is to detect connections with contemporary literature – which, of course, may also have implications for determining the primary audience of the beast narrative. In this context it is striking that *Van den vos Reynaerde* pays far more detailed attention to the conflict between Reynaert and his liege lord Nobel than does the Old French *Le Plaid*. It is possible that the author plays here with a topical theme from contemporary chivalric romance.

In Old French and Middle Dutch Charlemagne epics dating from the period 1170-1260, the antagonism between king and vassal is a major theme. The feudal order is maintained by powerful and loyal vassals like Guillaume d'Orange. However, in a number of texts internal tensions threaten the court community, because the king treats one of his loyal vassals unjustly. In a number of so-called 'traitor epics' the king is bribed or driven to do so by a malicious traitor who falsely accuses the loyal vassal of having devised a plot to murder the king, which he only just managed to foil, or so the traitor pretends. In the 'epics of revolt' (works like the Old French *Renaut de Montauban* and the Middle Dutch adaptation of this text, *Renout van Montalbaen*) the king through his own malice causes the loyal vassals to rebel and to go into forced exile. Only at the end of the tale are king and vassal reconciled and traitors vanquished. Then,

42 A court audience was argued by Van Oostrom 1983. On the Dampierre milieu, see Bouwman 1991, pp. 65-66 (n. 34), 425-426 (n.194-195), and cf. Van Daele 1998, p. 139.

43 See Pleij 1983 and Van Hoecke 1987, who regard the rise of a Flemish literature as an endeavour by the counts to increase their prestige with the French king, their liege lord. On the multifunctionality of Middle Dutch texts, see Prevenier 1994; Besamusca 1998 studies the *Moriaen*, a Middle Dutch Arthurian romance, from this point of view. Cf. also Wackers 2000a and Van Oostrom 2006, pp. 227-72.

too, the feudal order is restored with God's help. Possibly well-known patterns from Charlemagne epics are reversed in *Van den vos Reynaerde*. The fox may then be seen as a (triumphant!) traitor who manages to persuade King Nobel to take his two loyal vassals, Bruun the bear and Ysingrijn the wolf, prisoner and to maltreat them by telling a brilliantly fabricated story of a conspiracy and of an equally imaginary treasure. Alternatively, Reynaert can be seen as a rebel vassal who is not reconciled with the king, but deliberately and successfully leaves the court community, preferring voluntary exile.

The implied audience of *Van den vos Reynaerde* must also have been familiar with a range of animal stories. In the prologue the author regrets that *die avonture van Reynaerde* (4) had not yet been made in Dutch. It is only after several tens of lines that the tale appears to be about a fox, when it is said that all animals come to King Nobel's court day, 'except for Reynaert the fox alone' (50). Between the appearance of *Nobel die coninc* (44) and the first reference to his status as a lion, there are more than 1800 lines: *Voert sprac Reynaert: 'Coninc lyoen'* (1833) ('Reynaert continued: "King Lion"'). When Ysingrijn is introduced, it is again not stated what kind of animal he is. The audience is informed of this only much later, when Reynaert confesses to his nephew Grimbeert his crimes against Ysingrijn among much else. On that occasion he mentions that it was his doing that the villagers noticed 'that there was caught in the priest's larder a wolf' (1574-75). The author clearly did not think it necessary to mention the kind of animal concerned when he introduced these characters; he assumed that the audience would already be familiar with them from other stories. Where one passage from the fox's confession is concerned, such foreknowledge can be demonstrated.[44]

In Bruges, around 1275, the *Reynardus vulpes* was written, a translation of *Van den vos Reynaerde* in Latin verse (see above). The author of this work, Balduinus Iuvenis, is a representative of the earliest audience ever to hear or read Willem's poem. In the course of his perusal of the Flemish beast narrative Balduinus came across a passage in the episode of the fox's confession in which Reynaert declares that he has deceived the wolf on many occasions:

> 'Sint dedic hem meerren scamp
> up thijs, daer icken leerde visschen,
> daer hi niene conste ontwisschen.
> Hi ontfincker meneghen slach' (1504-7).
>
> (Later I caused him more disgrace on the ice, when I taught him to fish in a place where he could not escape. There he received a severe hiding.)

44 Our discussion of intertextuality is based primarily on Bouwman 1998, which also contains a concise survey of story elements in *Van den vos Reynaerde* with parallels in other beast narratives.

The fox refers here to a story about a fishing expedition on the ice, which existed independently from *Van den vos Reynaerde*. The oldest versions are found in the Latin *Ysengrimus* (ca. 1150) and in branch III (*Les Poissons*, ca. 1178) of the *Roman de Renart*. In his *Reynardus vulpes* Balduinus extended the passage from his exemplar from four to sixteen Latin lines (663-78). However, the details of the interpolation were not of his own devising; too many narrative elements which are lacking in *Van den vos Reynaerde* are found in the version of the story from the *Ysengrimus* and branch III to make that likely. As Balduinus could not possibly know from the four Middle Dutch lines what Ysingrijn was fishing with, and why he could not escape (the wolf had followed the fox's advice one night and had hung his tail in a hole in the ice which froze over during the night), he must have been familiar with another story about the wintry fishing expedition, from which he could derive material for his interpolation.[45]

Like Balduinus, the implied audience of *Van den vos Reynaerde* (assuming it was familiar with contemporary literature) also knew a version of 'the fishing expedition on the ice' as well as other beast narratives to which the text alludes. Willem's poem refers in passing to various episodes which are lacking from its Old French source *Le Plaid*. These episodes must have been known in the thirteenth century as independent narratives. Some of these literary cross-currents may well have enhanced the appreciation of some characters' manipulative speeches by those among the audience who were acquainted with these narratives.

Grimbeert vigorously defends his absent uncle against the charges that have been brought against him. He blackens the reputation of Ysingrijn, Reynaert's chief opponent, by dwelling on the cases when the wolf treated the fox badly. On one of those occasions the wolf is said to have taken advantage shamelessly of Reynaert's courage. After the fox had thrown fish down from a cart to Ysingrijn, who was following at a safe distance, all Reynaert was offered as his share of the plunder by the greedy wolf were the bones of one single fish (206-16). This story of the fox and the cart loaded with fish is found outside Willem's beast narrative in two branches of the *Roman de Renart*, dating from ca. 1178. The oldest version features as part of branch III. Renart shams dead when he sees a fish cart approaching. The merchants throw him on to the cart, with the intention of skinning the dead body at a later stage and selling the pelt. While the cart rattles along, Renart gorges himself on fish. Eventually the fox jumps down off the cart, with garlands of eels around his body, and taunts the merchants. A later version of his story is found in branch XIV (*La Queue – Primaut*), in which Renart tells the tale of his success in the fish cart to the wolf Primaut, one of Ysengrin's brothers. Primaut then also lies down in the middle of the road shamming dead when

45 See for the episode of the fishing expedition on the ice in *Reynardus vulpes*, with a Dutch translation, Huygens 1968, pp. 86-87.

a fish cart approaches, but this time the merchants are on their guard and give the wolf a merciless beating.

Grimbeert's story does not agree with the two Old French versions. One might assume that a story is referred to here which has been lost. However, another explanation is also worth considering. This particular fish cart version is Willem's own invention, and a variation on well-known versions not unlike the story of the stolen ham which Grimbeert is going to produce next as an example of a deception practised by Ysingrijn (217-29). In the same way as the fox goes to great lengths to procure the ham for Ysingrijn and is rewarded on that occasion with the string that it hung from, Reynaert throws fish down from the cart to the wolf, who leaves just one single fish' bones (214). The Middle Dutch author has Grimbeert twist the well-known versions of 'the fox and the fish cart' so that his uncle will be acquitted. That is the function of the link. Those among the audience who know the French versions will see through the procedure, and will reach the conclusion that Grimbeert is lying.

Based on its prior knowledge of beast narratives the story's public will have been able to estimate the extent to which characters in *Van den vos Reynaerde* re-interpret and twist older stories. That is an essential aspect of the retelling of events from branch II-Va by Ysingrijn, Grimbeert and Reynaert respectively. This oldest branch of the *Roman de Renart*, which was probably written around 1175, relates the beginning of the conflict between the fox and wolf. After a number of adventures that did not go well for the fox, Renart accidentally enters the den of the she-wolf Hersent, who has recently given birth to a number of cubs. Renart's claim that her husband Ysengrin has been telling everyone that the fox is in love with her makes Hersent so angry that she turns the allegation into action and commits adultery. Ysengrin hears what has happened from the cubs, who have been befouled by the fox and called sons of a whore. The wolf is furious with his wife, who realizes that Renart has deceived her. When they hunt the fox, Hersent runs ahead in her eagerness, gets stuck in one of the entrances to the fox's den, and is subsequently raped by Renart, an action witnessed from a distance by her husband who arrives a little later. Ysengrin charges the fox at King Noble's court with rape, keeping quiet in the meantime about the earlier adultery. However, the fox is not sentenced, but it is decided that Renart is to swear his innocence on the bones of a saint. Ysengrin decides to take the law into his own hands, and devises an ambush. On the appointed day Renart is to swear on the teeth of the mastiff Roonel, who is told to feign death. Then, as soon as he has gripped the fox with his jaws, a pack of dogs will pounce on the fox. However, the fox notices the deception and manages to escape just in time.

If the audience of *Van den vos Reynaerde* is familiar with the events in these branches, it will understand why the wolf, in making his complaint, not only remains silent about the adultery between the she-wolf and the fox, but deliberately mentions the

rape of Hersint and the maltreatment of the cubs in one breath, suggesting in so doing that the two crimes took place in the wolf's lair (thus obviating the need to explain that Hersint was raped in the fox's den, which, from a legal point of view, would be suspicious). The listener sees through Ysingrijn's pretence at astonishment when he states that Reynaert was to swear his innocence with an oath and continues: 'as the relics were brought, he changed his mind, and escaped us in his stronghold' (83-85). After all, it was not Reynaert's wily character, but the ambush with Roonel and the other mastiffs that made the fox decide to run for it. The audience, armed as it is with its knowledge of other stories, also understands that Grimbeert ignores the rape and stresses the adultery, which he re-interprets as proof of a courtly love affair of more than seven years standing between Reynaert and Haersint (234-46). Reynaert, too, alludes in his confession and at court to the adulterous relationship (1648-69, 1970-92), which makes sense only if it is assumed that the audience already knew the popular story about it.

How do these literary cross-currents affect our ideas about the primary audience of *Van den vos Reynaerde*? As the beast narratives that Willem takes to be common knowledge are not extant in Middle Dutch, but only in Old French, a bilingual audience must be assumed in Flanders. The fact that it knows that *Nobel die coninc* is a lion, shows familiarity with the Old French literary tradition in which King Lion is called Noble for the first time (see branche II-Va). The fact that in Willem's poem the small dog Cortoys 'complained to the king in French' (100), a complaint that is clearly understood perfectly by the courtiers, as Tybeert's and Grimbeert's reactions show, is also indicative of familiarity with bilingualism among the primary listeners of *Van den vos Reynaerde*. This also furthers our understanding of the reason why Willem did not limit himself to making a translation when he turned *Le Plaid* into Dutch (see also the prologue, line 4 ff.), but instead wrote a reworked narrative with a brilliant ending in literary competition with his French colleagues. After the fox's conviction the Old French author concludes his story using about two hundred lines. However, from this point onwards Willem adds another 1500 lines or so, almost doubling the poem in size, focusing on Reynaert's escape from his sentence by means of an elaborate and ingenious collection of lies. A bilingual audience will no doubt have enjoyed the competitive spirit (see p. 13). This seems an additional argument to regard the patricians of Ghent as the implied audience, as the Flemish-speaking urban elite learned French in childhood to facilitate contacts in adult life with commercial partners and the high aristocracy.

5. *Transmission and reception*

Van den vos Reynaerde is extant more or less complete in two Middle Dutch manuscripts containing several texts. The codices are known among scholars by the names of the places where they used to be kept: the Comburg manuscript and the Dyck manuscript. In addition fragments of three other manuscripts have been found. When after several centuries the codices had lost their original function, bookbinders used strips or leaves from these volumes in the bindings of printed books, from which they were retrieved in later centuries. Reynaert scholars refer to these fragments as the Darmstadt, Rotterdam and Brussels fragments, according to the cities where they are kept. The five sources are frequently referred to simply by the letters A, F, E, G and J.

The first manuscript (A) was discovered at the end of the eighteenth century in the library of the Ritterstift Comburg near Schwäbisch Hall in Baden-Württemberg (now Stuttgart, Württembergische Landesbibliothek, Cod. poet. et phil. 2° 22). It is a composite manuscript, assembled around 1540, that consists of six parts, all of which were produced in East Flanders (probably in Ghent) within a span of forty years (ca. 1380-1420) by ten different scribes. The volume numbers 346 parchment folios (267x195 mm) and contains some fifty different texts, among them *Die Rose* by a certain Heinric, poems by Jacob van Maerlant, *Van Sente Brandane*, sections from Jan van Boendale's *Der leken spieghel*, and the *Rijmkroniek van Vlaanderen*. The beast epic *Van den vos Reynaerde*, in total 3469 lines – on folios 192v°a – 213r°b – is part of the fourth manuscript, numbering 56 folios (179-234). It was copied at the beginning of the fifteenth century by scribe E with two columns of 42 lines per page in a Textualis, the usual formal bookscript.[46] The present edition is based on the text in this manuscript.[47]

The second complete manuscript (F) was not discovered until a century later, in 1907, again in a German aristocratic library, this time of Schloss Dyck near Neuss in Rheinland-Westfalen. The manuscript numbers 124 parchment folios (294/6x211 mm), written in two columns of 40 lines per page in a Textualis. It was probably produced in the period 1330-1360 in Nedersticht or the eastern part of the county of Holland. *Van den vos Reynaerde* numbers 3393 lines, covering folios 102r°b-123r°b, following Jacob van Maerlant's encyclopedia *Der naturen bloeme*. Since 1991 it has been kept in the Universitätsbibliothek Münster under shelfmark Ms. N.R. 381.[48]

46 Derolez 2006 distinguishes six basic types of gothic script: Textualis, Semitextualis, Cursiva antiquior, Cursiva, Hybrida, Semihybrida.

47 On ms. A (Comburg, now Stuttgart), see Brinkman & Schenkel 1997, pp. 9-111; cf. also Deschamps 1972, nr. 21; De Vos 1991.

48 On ms. F (Dyck, now Münster), see Muller 1908; Deschamps 1972, nr. 22; Overgaauw 1992; Overgaauw 1996.

The fragment of the third manuscript (E) – known since 1889 and now kept in Darmstadt, Hessische Landes- und Hochschulbibliothek under shelfmark Hs. 3321 – consists of a cropped and damaged parchment bifolium (now 216x148 mm), written with two columns of 36 lines per page in a Textualis. The manuscript from which the fragment originates must have been written in what is now the Dutch province of Limburg in the last quarter of the thirteenth century. The text comprises 287 lines, corresponding to lines 2588-2722, 3017-3158 in this edition.[49]

The fragments of the fourth manuscript (G) were presented in 1933 by Erik von Scherling, an antiquarian bookdealer in Leiden, to the codicologist Willem de Vreese, who acquired them for the Gemeentebibliotheek (Public Library) in Rotterdam, where they are kept under shelfmark 96 B 5 (*olim* 14 G 8). It consists of two and three strips of parchment, cut from two bifolia, filled with a single column of ca. 24 lines per page in a Textualis in an unusual lay-out: the last letter of each pair of rhyming words has been written only once (in the right margin at some distance from the rest of the text, at the level of the first rhyme word) and has been connected with the two rhyme words by wavy lines. This fourth manuscript was probably produced in the period 1260-1280, in the area around Geldern-Kleef, now in Germany. This makes it the oldest known source of *Van den vos Reynaerde*. The text numbers 63 partly damaged lines, which correspond to lines 2186-94, 2209-17, 2556-64, 2579-87, 3123-29, 3147-52, 3274-80, 3299-3305 in this edition.[50]

In 1971 fragments of a fifth Reynaert manuscript (J) were discovered in Brussels. Glued together with other fragments, they were used in the upper and lower covers of the binding of a printed book from the first half of the sixteenth century (now Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, ms. IV 774). It concerns six cropped paper folios (now 170x110 mm), written in a single column of 30/33 lines per page in a Cursiva, the cursive gothic bookscript. The manuscript to which the leaves originally belonged was produced in the first quarter of the fifteenth century in East Flanders. The text comprises 369 lines, roughly corresponding to lines 577-641, 830-91, 956-1023, 1465-1523, 1706-66, 2079-2142 in this edition.[51]

Van den vos Reynaerde must have been a popular text in the medieval Low Countries. This is indicated by the fact that it survives in five manuscripts, a relatively large number for a narrative work – at least by Dutch standards – from a number of different regions (Flanders, the county of Holland, Limburg, Geldern/Kleef), but also that a fellow author was twice inspired by Willem's work.[52]

49 On fragment E (Darmstadt), see Martin 1889; Gysseling 1980, nr. 30; Staub & Sänger 1991.

50 On fragment G (Rotterdam), see Muller 1940, pp. 204-9; Gysseling 1980, nr. 29. For fragment G as the remains of a minstrel's manuscript, see Besamusca 1987; this hypothesis was rejected in Gumbert 1989, pp. 117-19.

51 On fragment J (Brussels), see Deschamps 1975; Deschamps & Mulder 1998.

52 For a general survey, see Janssens & Van Daele 2001.

It was probably in Bruges that an author who called himself Balduinus Iuvenis wrote a Latin adaptation. He dedicated his *Reynardus vulpes* to Jan van Vlaanderen (1250-1291), son of the Flemish count Gwijde van Dampierre and prior of the chapter of Sint-Donaas in Bruges. Balduinus begins as follows: *Fabula Reynardi, sicut reor agnita multis teutonice scripta, metrificata sonet* ('may the history of Reynaert, known as I think to many in Dutch, now sound in Latin verse'). The poem was written between 1272-1279, but has been preserved only in a rather corrupt printed edition, produced in the workshop of Ketelaer and De Leempt in 1473 or 1474 in Utrecht, which is extant in two copies: Deventer, Stads- or Atheneumbibliotheek, Inc. VIII C 8 (4) and Mainz, Priesterseminar, Ms. 165 (8). Balduinus integrally adopted the narrative structure of *Van den vos Reynaerde* and often stayed close to the Flemish text with his choice of words. However, he definitely also added emphases that are entirely his own, mainly by means of abbreviations and moralisations, and placed himself in the Latin literary tradition. The *Reynardus vulpes* was – and still is – used mainly by literary historians as an early source (L) of *Van den vos Reynaerde*.[53]

Reynaerts historie, a poem of some 7800 lines, was written at least a century and a half later. In its first part the unknown Flemish poet follows *Van den vos Reynaerde* fairly accurately. However, in his version the fox does not flee into the wilderness, but stays at Mapertuus, while King Nobel extends the court day because of his reconciliation with Bruun and Ysegrim. A sequel of about 4300 lines has been added here, in which more charges are brought against Reynaert. At Nobel's court the fox defends himself against the accusations with the help of his clan. The trial ends in a judicial duel between Reynaert and Ysegrim, which the fox manages to decide in his favour. King Nobel next presents him with a high position in his realm. The text has been preserved in two manuscripts. The 'Brussels' manuscript (B), acquired in 1836 by the Koninklijke Bibliotheek in Brussels, where it is kept under shelfmark 14601, was produced around 1470 in the northern Low Countries, possibly in Utrecht, by a scribe who, according to two acrostics (in B 7805-7794) is called Claes van Aken.[54] The fragments (C), formerly in the possession of Hendrik van Wijn, were acquired by the Koninklijke Bibliotheek of The Hague in 1834, and are now kept under shelfmark 75 B 7. According to the colophon, these 'the Hague' fragments are the remnants of a manuscript that was produced

53 For a description of the incunabulum containing *Reynardus vulpes*, see Campbell 1874, nr. 978; ILC 1862. A diplomatic edition based on the Deventer copy was made by Hellinga 1952. A critical edition based on the same Deventer copy was made by Huygens 1968. For a study of the adaptation techniques used, see Jonkers 1985. For a survey of the *status quaestionis* and suggestions for further research, see Engels 1996a, 1996b.

54 For a description of ms. B (Brussels), see Deschamps 1972, nr. 23a. The text is available in a facsimile edition (De Keyser 1938), a diplomatic edition (Hellinga 1952) and the critical edition by Wackers (2002), which replaces two nineteenth-century editions (Willems 1836; Martin 1874). For an edition of the Middle Dutch text with a German translation, see Schlusemann and Wackers 2005.

in Holland in 1477. The text numbers 1055 lines, corresponding to B 6755-7793.[55] *Reynaerts historie* was long studied primarily as a 'textual link': on the one hand as an adaptation and, consequently, a source of *Van den vos Reynaerde*, on the other hand as an exemplar of the printed editions by Leeu, Caxton and others (see below). Only in the past few decades has literary appreciation of the text begun.

The verse text of *Reynaerts historie* was printed (probably unchanged) between 1487 and 1490 by Gheraert Leeu in Antwerp, illustrated with woodcuts, divided into chapters by Hinrek van Alckmer, and provided with summarizing chapter headings and prose moralisations.[56] Only seven leaves of this verse incunabulum (D) have survived (including four woodcuts), which are now kept in the University Library of Cambridge under shelfmark Inc. 4 F 6.2 (3367). The text corresponds to lines B 1513-88, 1639-55, 1753-72, 1780-890.[57] Hinrek van Alckmer's name occurs in the prologue to a Lower German adaptation of the verse incunabulum, *Reynke de vos* (R). The only complete copy of this edition, printed in Lübeck in 1498, which also has woodcuts, chapter headings and prose moralisations, is kept in the Herzog August-Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel (shelfmark 32. / 4 Poet. rar.).[58] It should be noted that the text of *Reynke de vos* does not derive directly from D, but from a now lost Dutch printed edition.

As *Reynke de vos*, the poem made a triumphant conquest of Europe, now documented in great detail by Hubertus Menke in his international Reynaert bibliography.[59] The Low German text was reprinted up to 1660, translated into High German in 1544 and into Danish in 1555. Publications in Swedish and Icelandic were based on the Danish edition, while the High German translation was reprinted no fewer than twenty-one times up to 1617. It spawned a number of subgroups, among them a set of seven Latin printed texts (1567-1612). On the basis of Gottsched's High German prose translation of *Reynke de vos* from 1752, Goethe composed his famous adaptation in hexameters: *Reineke Fuchs, In zwölf Gesängen* (1794). This poem established a tradition of its own, with translations into many languages.

A Middle Dutch prose adaptation of *Reynaerts historie* had already been printed by Gheraert Leeu in Gouda in 1479 and by Jacob Jacobsz. van der Meer in Delft in

55 For a description of fragment C (The Hague), see Deschamps 1972, nr. 23b. For a diplomatic edition of the text, see Hellinga 1952.

56 For a survey of the printed Dutch Reynaert tradition from the 15th to 19th century, see Wackers 2000b (in English).

57 For a description of verse incunabulum D, see Campbell 1874-1890, 2nd Suppl., nr. 977a; ILC 1861. For a reconstruction, see *Naar de letter* 1972, pp. 31-39. The D text is available in a facsimile edition (Breul 1927) and a diplomatic edition (Hellinga 1952).

58 The text of *Reynke de vos* is available in a facsimile edition (Sodmann 1976) and in an edition that includes a corresponding selection from the Middle Dutch versions (Goossens 1983a). For the sources of *Reynke de vos*, see Witton 1980.

59 See Menke 1992.

1485 as *Die historie van Reynaert die vos* (Pg, Pd). Two copies are extant of the text that was printed in Gouda: The Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, Inc. 169 G 98, and London, British Library, Inc. Grenville 10495. Of the book printed in Delft a single copy is extant: San Marino, Huntington Library, 100244 (PR 8873-5).[60] Two years after Leeu, William Caxton printed *The history of reynaerd the fox* (1481) in Westminster, translated by himself from a 'copye whiche was in dutche' (W); this is the beginning of an English Reynaert tradition that encompasses three centuries. It is likely that Pg was not the first printed prose *Reynaert*, as neither Pd nor W appear to derive directly from Pg. The prose editions share a division into chapters with summarizing headings, but lack the moralisations and the woodcuts that grace the rhymed version.[61]

The so-called Reynaert chapbooks produced in the Low Countries can be divided into three groups.[62] These are the sixteenth-century luxury publications by Plantijn (H1564, H1566), the chapbooks from the northern parts of the Low Countries (Hn: 16th-18th century) and those from the southern Low Countries (Hz: 17th- 20th century).[63] Various printed editions must have been lost; some are known only because they are referred to somewhere, or are hypothetical. Each of the three groups is in its own way based on a reconstructed printed edition (H), for which material is believed to have been derived from the tradition of both D (prologue and illustrations) and P (prose text).[64] The adaptation techniques used in the chapbooks – abbreviation, simplification, moralisation, alteration of offensive passages (a frequent phenomenon in printed texts in the Southern Low Countries which were subject to ecclesiastical censure) – have proved rewarding objects of research.[65]

The rediscovery at the beginning of the nineteenth century of the medieval manuscripts containing *Van den vos Reynaerde* in combination with the fascination with the past that Romanticism had aroused, created an immense interest in the Reynaert material. In the newly formed state of Belgium (dominated by a French-speaking elite) this

60 For a description of the printed editions in prose Pg and Pd, see Campbell 1874, nos. 976 and 977; ILC 1859, 1860. The text of Pg, based on the copy in The Hague, is available in a diplomatic edition (Hellinga 1952 and Rijns 2007); for variants in Pd as compared to Pg, see Rijns 2007.

61 For the printing history of the prose adaptations, see Hellinga 1965; Vriesema 1980; Witton 1980; Goossens 1983 (woodcuts); Schlusemann 1991.

62 For a bibliography of the so-called Reynaert chapbooks, see Verzandvoort & Wackers 1983; Menke 1992.

63 The text of a number of chapbooks has been published. For H1564, see Martin 1876, Rijns 2007; for H1566, see Sabbe and Willems 1924, Rijns 2007; for Hn1589, see Rijns 2007; for Hn, ca. 1780, see *Merlijn* 1975; for Hz, 1651, see Rijns 2007; for Hz, ca. 1700, see Verzandvoort and Wackers 1988, Rijns 2007. Rijns 2007 provides diplomatic and synoptic editions of the sources between 1479 (Pg) and 1700 (Hz).

64 On the relationships among the Reynaert chapbooks, see *Naar de letter* 1972, pp. 70-82; Goossens 1981.

65 For an analysis of adaptation techniques in Reynaert chapbooks, see Goossens 1988; Wackers & Verzandvoort 1989.

interest was further strengthened by the 'flamingants', a Flemish emancipatory movement that drew upon the cultural achievements of their medieval ancestors to demand equal rights. Editions of the Middle Dutch texts, as well as a large number of modern adaptations for the entertainment of both adult and young readers were the result.[66] In Dutch literary histories, *Van den vos Reynaerde* now takes pride of place.

66 For a survey of adaptations of *Van den vos Reynaerde* from the 19th and 20th centuries, see Goossens 1988; for an analysis of these texts, see Van Daele 1990, Goossens 1996a.